

[Phone ringing]

- Interviewee:* Hey Rick.
- Interviewer:* Hi Latoya, how are you?
- Interviewee:* How you doing?
- Interviewer:* I'm okay, how you doing?
- Interviewee:* Well thank you. I'm going to close my door right now.
- Interviewer:* I'm sorry, what was that?
- Interviewee:* I was closing my door.
- Interviewer:* Okay.
- Interviewee:* So we can talk about Marion Barry.
- Interviewer:* Okay, great.
- Interviewee:* Or like you like to say "Murr Burr."
- Interviewer:* [Chuckles] Yes.
- Interviewee:* Okay, so I am setting up my iPhone now.
- Interviewer:* Excellent thank you.
- Interviewee:* If I need to stop in some areas is that okay.
- Interviewer:* Mm-hmm.
- Interviewee:* And pick back up, okay.
- Interviewer:* All right.
- Interviewee:* Okay I'm ready when you are.
- Interviewer:* Okay. So yeah tell me, I guess tell me when you first met, tell me when you first met him.
- Interviewee:* I met Mayor Barry as a kid growing up here in Washington, DC. That was my first encounter with Mayor Barry. If I'm not mistaken I believe he presented me with an award when I was in elementary

school, an art award actually and that was my very first encounter with him. Who would have thought that probably over 30 years later I would end up working for him?

Interviewer: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about you know what sort of an effect he had? I mean you said you were two when he was first elected.

Interviewee: Yes I was two years old when Marion Barry was elected Mayor of Washington, DC.

The effect that he had on me, you know I'm one of those who actually enjoyed the fruits of being a participant in the summer youth employment program, saying that Marion Barry gave me my first job.

Interviewer: You'd be far from alone in that.

Interviewee: *[Laughs]* We hear that anywhere you go around the city. "Marion Barry you gave me my first job." "Thank you Mayor Barry you gave me my first job." So I mean we've heard that over the years.

What I learned from him at the end of working for him you know is he had a brilliant mind, he was always a forward thinker, and he always kept the people first and I think that's some of the greatest lessons we can learn from him.

Interviewer: Sure. You know I mean he obviously you know I've asked a bunch of people who sort of saw and experienced that campaign and it was very much a, it was very much a grassroots kind of thing.

Interviewee: Absolutely.

Interviewer: I mean obviously when you're trying to leapfrog a sitting mayor and a council president like he did you got to do something a little bit different and it seems like that's what he brought to the table that was different, yeah?

Interviewee: Mayor Barry always said that you had to have two things to be an effective leader, big vision and courage, those were his two.

Interviewer: Yep.

Interviewee: You have to be a visionary. You have to be able to see beyond what's in front of you. You have to have the courage to push those agendas forward even if you are the lone voice on an issue.

Interviewer: Okay. I mean that's great and it's important, but it has to translate to concrete steps as well.

Interviewee: Absolutely.

Interviewer: I mean one of the things I'm hearing is that he was, that his campaign was able to I'm not sure whether it was sign-up lots of new voters or get voters to the polls who didn't normally vote. Did you know anything about that?

Interviewee: Well he would talk about how he would campaign especially in the beginning he referenced that he and his campaign would work 15 hours per day, every day, including weekends. How they would basically like you said it was a grassroots effort. He was talking to the people, he was listening to their concerns, listening to their needs and then you know making a list of what those needs were. Seeing how effectively make sure that he was giving the community what they needed and what they asked for quite frankly.

Interviewer: Right. You know one of the many stories I've heard about him in the oral history that's over at the George Washington Library now, is that he always had a pocketful of quarters and dimes and he could not go past a payphone without stopping and calling some people and he had thousands of phone numbers in his memory. Did you notice that?

Interviewee: I can't speak to as far as stopping at phones. By the time I had got to him of course we had cell phones so the dynamic had changed a little.

Interviewer: Right.

Interviewee: What I can say is that well you said he had coins with him everywhere he went and he would stop at a pay phone and what would he do again?

Interviewer: Oh he would just, he would always take the opportunity to call somebody when he was out and that he had, you know that he had thousands of phone numbers in his head.

Interviewee: Thousands of numbers. Now here's what we have to remember about Mayor Barry. Mayor Barry was a dissertation away from having a Ph.D. in chemistry, so he kept numbers in his head. He could recite any number; even days before his death any number of

someone who he wanted to reach he could give you his number right off the top of his head. That came from him being you know a chemistry major.

Interviewer: Yeah or you know it came from the same mental acuity that lead him to be a chemistry major, one or the other I suppose.

Interviewee: Sure, absolutely, absolutely.

Interviewer: Yeah. It seems like you know that sort of grassroots personal approach that seems like the, that seems like it built a kind of really durable base of support which obviously he needed in the later years.

Interviewee: Absolutely. He also remembered faces a lot of times as well. So if he touched you, if you touched him in the community a lot of times he could recall you know meeting you and where he might have met you.

Interviewer: That's a critical, that's a critical thing for any politician isn't it?

Interviewee: Absolutely. And going back to your point about how he could remember numbers. I remember him telling me about his encounter with Effi Slaughter, who would later become his wife, Effi Barry, first lady of the city.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: When he first met her and she was looking for her purse. He said, "Um," he said, "Did you find it?" She was like, "Find what?" He's like, "My um." He said, "Did you find it for me?" She's like, "What?" He's like, "Your number." She was like, "What?" [Laughs] You know and it was a joke between them and he said, "Give me your number." She's like, "You'll never remember it." And she gave him her number and he called the next day, he remembered it.

Interviewer: Yep, I've heard that story, that's a great one.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Now one of the things that I thought was, um, one of the things that I thought was unusual as I'm readying more about this 1978 campaign and you know I'm asking other people as well, but I don't know if you can help me on this as well either, but there was

you know he obviously in the last years of his life he represented Ward 8.

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: In 1978 he did not win Ward 8, he won Ward 3. I mean he got a lot of support from white people which was not necessarily, which is not necessarily repeated in his later campaigns. Do you know anything about that or any ideas on the source of that?

Interviewee: Yes I can't speak to that one unfortunately.

Interviewer: Mmm, yeah, no it's, I was, I was kind of surprised especially somebody who was such an activist, who was so outspoken in terms of, you know in terms of advocating for the black community and he won Ward 3 and he did not win Ward 8.

Interviewee: Well the thing is and I don't know this, this would take some research, what did Wards 7 and 8 look like in 1978? Did they look the same as they look now?

Interviewer: Maybe not exactly, but I know what you mean. I know that Ward 8, but I'm pretty sure that had changed by then.

Interviewee: Okay.

Interviewer: But you're right that is something I will look into.

Interviewee: Yeah I would look into that to figure out you know the demographics and where they were more heavily concentrated.

Interviewer: Okay. Now did you know Walter Washington or Sterling Tucker?

Interviewee: No.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Mm-mmm.

Interviewer: Yeah, no I'm just curious. You know I mean they sounded like, they sounded like good people themselves, but I'm just curious you know.

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, yeah I would have been too young.

- Interviewer:* Yeah. It just seems like they didn't – they were up against something that they were – that you know that the times had changed around them if nothing else.
- Interviewee:* But I also think too that from what I can recall when he was telling me his story of you know campaigning to become mayor you know kind of how he tried to set himself apart. He said things that, in his view he said things that people were afraid to discuss. He would bring it up in a real person manner versus tiptoeing around an issue. He thought that that you know kind of conveyed well to the people.
- Interviewer:* Right, right. I mean it just seems yeah.
- Interviewee:* Yeah that was one of the things that he thought set him apart when he was running. The way that he was able to convey certain things to the people; he spoke about the same way people would speak about something behind closed doors.
- Interviewer:* Mm-hmm.
- Interviewee:* And he thought that real-person approach is what set him apart.
- Interviewer:* Yeah I mean and it seems like that held him in good stead his entire life.
- Interviewee:* Exactly.
- Interviewer:* I mean I've heard some of the speeches he gave during his lowest times and he never, you know he never tried to deny that these things were happening.
- Interviewee:* Right.
- Interviewer:* Yeah. It seems like you know the kind of politician you don't see very often.
- Interviewee:* Mayor Barry's pride in being a champion for the people.
- Interviewer:* Yep.
- Interviewee:* That was his legacy. That's what he wanted to live for to be a champion for the people. Even days before his death he was still thinking about ways that he could touch and enhance the lives of people.

Interviewer: Do you remember any specifics of what he was thinking about and working on at the time?

Interviewee: Interestingly enough I know that he was thinking about and Mayor Bowser has already put it into effect was the Office on African American Affairs and the Commission on Fatherhood and Boys was one of them.

Interviewer: Okay. You know it's interesting to me, you know it's and it actually really just now occurred to me, one of the things that has been a very common, a very common sort of refrain over the past 40 years is that you know there's no substitute for a job in terms of lifting someone out of poverty, giving them a sense of self-worth.

Interviewee: That's right, that's right.

Interviewer: And the thing that Marion Barry did that was different I mean usually these days frankly when you hear that argument it's an argument to give tax cuts to rich people so that hopefully they will turn around and give someone a job.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: But Marion Barry took the same principle but he knew that in terms of the ways that it could benefit a person in poverty a government job was just as good.

Interviewee: Absolutely. You know and I think back to you know when he talked about in his own life as a kid he had a newspaper route and at that time he didn't realize it, but later on that would be where he would get the idea for the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program, because he wanted to make sure that young people had an opportunity to make a little money and you know learn some responsibility and some skills along the way. In addition to that even as a council member oftentimes like contracts would come through the council he would them – anything that was over \$1 million he would kind of fine-tooth comb it to ensure that minority contractors were getting an opportunity and a fair shot on those particular contracts that were coming through the city as well.

So his thing was to make sure if you give people... And the same thing goes for Mayor Bowser too, if you give people an opportunity and resources and training and a good paying job then everything else will kind of fall in place.

- Interviewer:* Sure. You know that sort of thing that Marion Barry did... I had been reading that he, that that was, that that sort of they call it a "set aside" was struck down by the Supreme Court, is that true?
- Interviewee:* I'd have to look into that one. I can't say for sure.
- Interviewer:* Okay.
- Interviewee:* Not off the top of my head I can't say for sure.
- Interviewer:* Yeah, no I'm, I'm – I would love to, I would love to speak with Mayor Bowser about what she learned from Mayor Barry and what she [unintelligible] *[crosstalk]*.
- Interviewee:* Oh yes she's going to have a lot for sure.
- Interviewer:* Yeah.
- Interviewee:* As a matter of fact if you probably go back and look to what she said at his funereal you'll get a lot from it.
- Interviewer:* Okay, okay.
- Interviewee:* Because she'll talk about how he always said, "I met Muriel Bowser when she was 14." She was like, "Actually I was six." *[Laughter]* So she's known Marion Barry for a long, long time.
- Interviewer:* Okay, all right. Yeah is there – do you think we're going to be able to set something up?
- Interviewee:* I think so, yeah I think so.
- Interviewer:* Okay.
- Interviewee:* And here's another good opportunity Rick, I would even suggest and I know this isn't what you had in mind, but if you wanted to get a minute or two just to ask her a question, Mayor Council Breakfast tomorrow is a good start.
- Interviewer:* Okay. Well I might be able to, I might be able to get there, but you know hopefully I'd be able to talk with her more in-depth at some point later.
- Interviewee:* Yeah, yeah absolutely, absolutely, yeah. We're trying to get something on the calendar now.

- Interviewer:* Okay. Well and I'm speaking with Councilmember Gray on Wednesday.
- Interviewee:* Oh nice.
- Interviewer:* Yeah so that will –
- Interviewee:* He'll have some great reflections too.
- Interviewer:* Oh I'm sure. Oh so you said, you said that you were one of the many who Marion Barry gave you your first job?
- Interviewee:* I got my first summer job through Marion Barry.
- Interviewer:* And what was that?
- Interviewee:* I was working at Fort Dupont Park Recreation Center.
- Interviewer:* Okay. Doing what?
- Interviewee:* I was a camp counselor.
- Interviewer:* There you go. *[Laughter]* All right well thank you very much. And if I can give you a call if there's something else and I will try and make it to the breakfast tomorrow.
- Interviewee:* Call me any time Rick. Glad to help.
- Interviewer:* All right, all right thanks much.
- Interviewee:* Thanks a bunch and I'll send you this as well.
- Interviewer:* Okay, thank you.
- Interviewee:* Okay, thanks, bye-bye.
- Interviewer:* Bye.

[End of Audio]